

Remarks at the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center in Houston April 14, 1998

Thank you very much. Once again, I'm delighted to be back here. I have to beg your pardon for starting this program a little late, but when I get here, I get involved in what I'm doing. And besides that, John Glenn wanted to make sure I saw every single square inch—[laughter]—of space he would be living and maneuvering in—which didn't take all that long to see, actually. [Laughter] But we've had a wonderful day.

I want to thank Dan Goldin for doing a marvelous job. One thing he did not mention was the fact that he made the decision, which I strongly supported, to continue our involvement with the *Mir*, to participate with our partners there in the spirit of international cooperation in space. And I thank him for that. I'd also like to say to George Abbey, thank you very much for all the work that you and all the wonderful people here do. Thank you, Mayor Brown. I'm very proud that you were once a member of my Cabinet, and I see you've gone on to higher things. [Laughter]

That reminds me—you know, Abraham Lincoln used to keep regular office hours in the White House. And a woman broke in the White House one day, in a fit of anger and anxiety, worried about something, and she ran into him. And she was so excited she didn't recognize him—there wasn't any television back then, of course—and she said, "I demand to speak to no one lower than the President." And he said, "Ma'am, there is no one lower than the President." [Laughter]

So you folks gave Lee a promotion. I understand he's the first mayor, actually sitting mayor, to come out here to the Johnson Center, and I think that's a very good thing, and I appreciate that.

I'd like to thank Congressman Lampson. You just heard—he's the fairly eloquent advocate on your behalf. I asked him whether he and I should volunteer to go to Mars if we get the mission. It would make a lot of people happy, at least if I went, I think. [Laughter]

I'd like to thank Representatives Sheila Jackson Lee and Gene Green and Ken Bentsen for being here today and for the work they do for Texas, for the Houston area. I'd like to thank

your Land Commissioner, Garry Mauro, and your State Senator, Rodney Ellis, for being here, and the other city officials who are here, Don Boney, Sylvia Garcia. Judge Eckels, thank you for coming. I'd like to thank Colonel Curt Brown, who is the commander for the mission Senator Glenn is going to. And you see his whole team back here, including a member from Japan and a member from Europe, who is a native from Madrid, Spain. And we're glad to have all of them here.

I'd like to thank David Wolfe and all the other astronauts that showed me around, and also the folks on the Neurolab team that talked to me by long distance.

I have had another great day here at the Johnson Space Center. On behalf of all your fellow Americans, I want to thank you, those of you who work here, for expanding the frontiers of our knowledge, launching our imagination, helping our spirits to soar. Each of you—our scientists, our engineers, our astronauts, those of you who work in other capacities—embody the bold, restless, pioneering spirit of America.

I'm also proud to be here, as Dan Goldin said, with our oldest and newest man in space, John Glenn. He and Mrs. Glenn—Annie, who is here with us, and I'm delighted to see her—have been good friends of Hillary's and mine for a long time now. I have loved working with him in Washington. I, frankly, was heartsick when he said he wasn't going to run again for the Senate. He said, "Well, I'm too old." [Laughter] And he said, "Oh, by the way, can you get me into space?" [Laughter] I said, "Now, wait a minute, John, you're too old to do 6 more years in the Senate, but you're plenty young enough to go into space?"

The truth is, this man has done 149 combat missions in World War II and Korea; 4 hours, 55 minutes, and 23 history-making seconds aboard *Friendship 7*; and 4 terms in the United States Senate. In today's atmosphere, perhaps that latter accomplishment was his most hazardous duty; maybe it is safer for him to go into space. [Laughter] But he's here doing what he has desperately wanted to do. And I think I can say, without fear of anyone contradicting me,

that the decision was made by Dan Goldin to allow Senator Glenn to participate because we thought it would be good for the space program, good for science, good for the American people, good for our future.

The only thing is—as Dan and I were talking on the way in about what remarkable shape John and Annie are in, and the whole purpose of him going up there, you know, is to find out what the effects of space and long space travel are on the aging process and on the elderly, and since he really hasn't aged in the last 40 years—it's going to be a total bust. [*Laughter*] But we'll get a kick out of watching him wander around up there anyway.

I do want to say, seriously, we are living longer than ever before as Americans. It is imperative that we live healthier than ever before. That requires not only the maintenance of our physical health, but the continuing fires of our imagination.

We have a lot of health care costs now associated with our longevity. A lot of people complain about it. I personally think it's a high-class problem, and the older I get, the more I think it's a high-class problem. But it is imperative that we learn as much as we can about the aging process. That's one of the most exciting things I think will come out of the Neurolab mission that's going up on Thursday. It's also imperative that we hold up as role models people who, in their mid-seventies, still dare to dream new dreams. And I think we should all learn a lesson from that, whether we can go into space or not.

Thanks to NASA, America has met President Kennedy's challenge of becoming the world's leading space-faring nation. We've left our footprints on the Moon, explored the surface of Mars, completed 89 space shuttle missions, orbited Earth for 755 days, 12 hours, and 44 minutes. When the 90th mission lifts off into space this Thursday, 238 Americans will have had the chance to see the stars up close, and more and more, to see the stars up close and to work with dedicated people from other nations who share the same goals and dreams of a peaceful, cooperative future.

We've launched satellites and probes that have alerted us to weather phenomenon like El Nino, discovered water on the Moon, made instantaneous communication between peoples on opposite sides of the Earth a reality.

And yet, even as you have worked hard to reach for the stars, NASA has more than ever kept its feet grounded in fiscal discipline. Congressman Lampson's claim for an adequate budget for NASA's future is bolstered by the leadership Dan Goldin has given. Since 1993, productivity at NASA has increased by 40 percent; new spacecraft are being built in half the time at much less cost. That is something you can be proud of. And in the 1980's, we launched just two solar system exploration missions. This year we're on schedule to launch a spacecraft every 10 weeks.

I am committed to maintaining a strong, stable, balanced space program. Our balanced budget will support 28 new space missions—missions that will help us decipher more of the mysteries of black holes and ancient stars and of Earth and, indeed, life itself.

Hillary and I are working on a big national celebration of the millennium, which, as you know, is not very many days away now, and we have called it, "honoring our past and imagining our future." We have asked the Congress to dramatically increase the research and development budget for America across all the areas where we need to be learning more and looking more. We cannot imagine our future without a vigorous, comprehensive, and consistent commitment to our mission in space. And I thank you for what you're doing today.

On the day after Senator Glenn's first historic flight, at the height of the cold war, President Kennedy invited the Russians to join us in exploring outer space. "We believe that when men reach beyond this planet they should leave their national differences behind them," he said. "All will benefit if we can invoke the wonders of science instead of its errors." Thirty-six years later, we are indeed leaving behind national differences, invoking the wonders of science for the benefit of humanity.

Seven Americans have lived aboard the Russian space station, *Mir*—the last 6 for 25 consecutive months—working with Russians and 14 other nations. Soon, the international space station will be launched—the size of a football field, so large it will actually be visible to the naked eye here on Earth.

Yes, as Mr. Goldin alluded, it was a fight for awhile, and there were those who thought we should abandon it. But we did not abandon it. And 10 or 20 years from now, people will wonder that we ever even considered such a

thing, because we will all, before long, be thanking our lucky stars that we had the vision to work with people from around the world to set up the international space station in the sky. From it we will explore vast new frontiers, chart unexplored seas, reach a little deeper into the vast final frontier.

In so many ways, your mission here at NASA reflects the spirit of America for every child who's ever tied a cape made of a sheet or a rag around his neck and dreamed of flying, for every mother who ever sang a child to sleep with "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," for every senior citizen who ever stared at the heavens in the wonder of what might be out there. You are the place where dreams are made real, where impossible missions are accomplished by remarkable people.

We have become a great nation in no small measure because our people have always recognized the limitless possibilities of the human spirit. I have every confidence that those of you

who work here at Johnson Space Center will always carry that conviction not only in your minds but in your hearts. When it comes to exploring space, we must never consider any mission impossible. The story of our space program is the story of barriers broken and new worlds uncovered. Let us make sure that is the story of our space program in the 21st century.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:55 p.m. in Building 9. In his remarks, he referred to George W.S. Abbey, Director, Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center; Houston Mayor Lee Patrick Brown; City Councilman Jew Don Boney, Jr.; City Controller Sylvia R. Garcia; Judge Robert A. Eckels, Harris County Commissioners Court; Lt. Col. Curtis L. Brown, Jr., USAF, STS-95 mission commander; and astronauts Chiaki Mukai, Japanese Space Agency, Pedro Duque, European Space Agency, and David A. Wolfe, NASA.

Remarks at the ESPN Townhall Meeting on Race in Houston April 14, 1998

[ESPN commentator Bob Ley, who served as moderator, welcomed the President and asked what such a dialog on race and sports could bring to the Nation at large.]

The President. Well, first of all, let me thank you and ESPN for doing this for the second time, and thank our panelists for being willing to put themselves on the line and be honest and open and accountable to the audience.

I'd like to say a couple of things I think we can achieve. First of all, America, rightly or wrongly, is a sports-crazy country and we often see games as a metaphor or a symbol of what we are as a people. So I think by dealing with both the positive things which have happened, in terms of opportunity for people of all races and people getting together and working together, and the continuing challenges in athletics, I think just by doing that we learn more about the rest of the country and what needs to be done.

Beyond that, I think that it's important that people see that in athletics in America, that the rules are fair, that people get their fair

chance, and I would hope, too, that the concern for the lives of the players off the field, off the court, and what they're doing when their athletic careers are over, and whether they still will be full and equal members of society, closing the opportunity gaps that have existed historically between the races in our country—whether there's something we can do about that, because that clearly will have larger implications for the society as a whole.

But all of us, as Americans, I think, should be both proud of how far we've come when we see what racial and ethnic and religious tensions are doing in other parts of the world, and at the same time should be very determined to continue to meet the challenges that still exist, because our country is becoming more and more racially and ethnically diverse. And if we can be one America, celebrating our diversity but knowing what we have in common, then it's the greatest asset I can imagine for us to take into the 21st century. But it's something we really have to work at, as I'm sure all these folks will tell us.